

His Star in the East

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Matt. I. 2. "We have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

We are approaching the bacchanalian festival which we call Christmas. To celebrate the birth of God, we give rein to the brute that is within us. Some with gluttony, some with drunkenness, some with debauchery, some with vain glory celebrate the advent of the Saviour, whose mission was a protest against these things.

Before you are swept for another year into this maelstrom of vanity, I call you to consider in sober seriousness the folly and the sin of much that enters into the Christmas celebration.

Mere condemnation will avail little: Meditation upon the deeper significance of the season may accomplish much.

While I am not so foolish as to think that these messages will stay the mania which masters our community at this time. I have faith to believe that they will influence in part the conduct of many.

With the desire to bring to pass a better Christmas, I shall speak at the evening services of this month upon the Birthday of the King. Our theme tonight is:

His Star in the East.

The Magi said to the men of Jerusalem, "We have seen His star in the East and are come to worship him."

Matthew first emphasizes the two elements of Christ's origin—his human descent and his divine sonship. He then records the two attitudes of the world toward him, the Magi and Herod. He is loved much and hated bitterly.

This wicked man represents the carnal, selfish world, jealous of the claims of the New King, seeking with the sword to destroy.

The wise men represent the waiting, expectant, heart-hungry world, led by the star of promise, to the feet of the Messiah.

It is of these seekers after truth that we speak tonight—their vision and their offering. "We have seen," yea more than that, "we are come."

Of the wicked man, who rejects and persecutes, we shall have naught to say, save as the shadow of his presence serves to bring into bolder relief these wise men who worship at the cradle of the new-born King.

The names, even the number, of these wise men are unknown. Perhaps because of the three-fold gift a tradition arose that there were three. The mediaeval Church assigned to them names, Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. Because of the use of these names in Ben Hur the average man imagines that he really knows the number, the names, even the traits of those lonely pilgrims from the East.

They were undoubtedly Magi, priests and princes of truth, astrologers in the high sense. Their home

doubtless was Arabia or Persia. They evidently knew of Jehovah and the promised Messiah. Probably through the Hebrews of the Dispersion, who were still scattered far and wide in Mesopotamia and throughout the East, they had learned of Israel's hope.

They declared that in the East they had seen his star. What of the Star?

It may have been a miracle: a star sent of God to herald the advent of the King of kings. When Christ is seen in the richness of his person, and the fulness of his mission, faith in a miracle that marks his advent becomes easy.

Or else it may have been a providential appointment, whereby through some sign in the heavens God spake to these searchers after truth.

Kepler calculated that in the Roman year 748 a remarkable conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn and Mars occurred. He thought it probable that an extraordinary star was conjoined with these planets, as was the case in 1603.

It is a very striking fact that the Chinese astronomical tables record the appearance of a new star at this very time.

The wise men believed that this star indicated the fulfillment of prophecy, so to Jerusalem they came, seeking the new-born King.

When they came forth from the palace of Herod, having already learned from the priest and scribe that Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of the Messiah, lo! in the zenith stood that star. In the language of simple faith we read: "And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was."

You may accept either interpretation of the star—the more literal, which insists upon a miracle—or the less literal, which insists upon the Divine hand providentially used—in either there is God. His presence is the one supreme essential of the record. His hand through providence or by miracle leads the Magi over the sands of the desert to the house in Bethlehem, where the eternal King is sheltered.

The scene upon which we look is matchless, both in its beauty and in its lessons of truth.

Filled with joy, they came into the house. It was not the stable. The shepherds had found him there. But now a better shelter has been provided for the mother and her Babe.

They saw "the young child, with Mary his mother—and they fell down and worshipped him: and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts: gold and frankincense, and myrrh."

The beauty of this scene needs no enforcement. It fires the imagination: it masters the soul. Of the lessons taught I desire to speak. Four great truths emerge as we meditate upon the record.